

Getting Started: Using the Main Street Approach

Building Support

Form a working group: Ask colleagues in your community about starting a revitalization initiative. Canvass all 'stakeholders' who have an interest in the future of your downtown or commercial district, including merchants, business owners, property owners, and residents. Contact the mayor and other local government officials, the city planning department, city economic development officials, and other organizations, such as the chamber of commerce or merchants association. Form a working group or task force of interested individuals and community leaders to explore launching an initiative. The wider the group of people you gather, the easier it is to build support and spread the word. All of these entities will benefit from a revitalized district and should support your effort, both programmatically and financially, so you need to bring them to the table now.

Take a good look at your district: Look at your downtown or commercial district as if you are a first-time visitor. What are its strengths? What needs improvement? Take photos and make notes.

Generate broad-based local interest and support: Hold a community meeting to discuss the idea. Call the Montana Main Street Program for advice and possible attendance at the meeting and to give the Main Street approach introduction presentation. Also use photographs to illustrate what needs to be done. Ask for feedback from participants and invite them to join the effort. Take their contact information and follow up later.

Find out how to obtain designation: Contact the Montana Main Street Program. Learn the requirements and process.

Network with successful programs: Invite an executive director or board president from another Main Street community to talk with your working group or community about their accomplishments and answer questions about how the program works. Their enthusiasm, stories, and pictures will make a strong argument for a preservation-based revitalization program. Facilitate discussions among your stakeholders and those already involved with other Main Street programs. This type of dialog is invaluable, especially for members of the working group. Get mayors, business owners, and economic development staff to network.

Spread the word: Ask the local newspaper(s) to run a story about the commercial district revitalization initiative. Position a member of the working group as a guest on the local radio station to explain how the community can start a program.